

## PERSONAL FIREARMS SAFETY

Personal firearms safety is a great topic for discussion at the beginning of hunting season or prior to any recreational shooting. Too often individuals handle weapons without understanding the safety features or not reviewing them after long periods between uses. The other issue that needs to be highlighted is the involvement of alcohol when handling firearms which impairs judgment and should not be tolerated. To size up the issue, there is no way to determine the actual number of firearms owners in the U.S. However, estimate indicates there are 270 million total guns. That's an average of 89 firearms for every 100 residents. The safe handling of any weapon, on or off duty, is your responsibility and is paramount for anyone who handles firearms. Knowing the characteristics of your firearm, adhering the standards of safety and just overall common sense play an important and vital role in the safe use of weapons.

Firearms accidents are preventable if the basic rules of safety are followed. Key to personal firearms safety is the three pillars of safe handling: Firearms training, adhering to approved safety practices and properly maintaining your firearm in a good working condition. First and foremost, attend a personal firearms training course. Understanding the basics of marksmanship and safe handling can be learned at a reputable pistol range in your area.

As a reminder, here are the rules for gun safety:

### I. Handling:

**1. Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.** This rule is sometimes misleading. Some people believe that every weapon should be loaded. This is not what it means. This rule means that no matter what condition you believe the firearm is in always act as if it is loaded. It is generally not possible to tell just by looking if a weapon is loaded.

**2. Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot.** Firearms are tools and like any tool it has a purpose. A firearm's purpose is to punch deadly holes in threatening targets. You would never use a saw on something you did not want to cut, or hit something with a sledge hammer that you did not wish to break. It is the same with a firearm, if you don't want to kill your target then don't point a firearm at it.

**3. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you *intend to fire*.** Actually placing your finger in the trigger housing and on the trigger should be the very last action before firing the weapon. Humans have a flinch response that causes them to clench their hands when startled. If your finger is on the trigger while you are walking with a firearm and you trip, fall or hear a loud noise you would instinctively pull the trigger. With your finger outside the trigger guard and held straight alongside the frame of the weapon this will not happen. As soon as you are done shooting the finger should be immediately taken off the trigger and held straight along the frame of the firearm.

**4. Keep your weapon on safe until you are ready to fire.** If your firearm is equipped with an external safety device, never disengage it until you are ready for your firearm to discharge a bullet. If placing the firearm in a holster, ensure that the safety is on. There is nothing more embarrassing or painful than shooting yourself in the leg or foot due to your own negligence.

**5. Only handle weapons when you are sober and never horse play with a weapon.** Yes, you read that correctly, “sober” and “no horse play” are suppose to be no brainers but many of the reported incidents involve one or both. Never use alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription or other drugs before or while shooting. It is a fact that alcohol and most drugs in the body affect judgment and impair reflexes. Hunters must be alert at all times. Hunting grounds is not the place for this combination, nor is anywhere else. Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages or drugs that impair you before and during trips to the range, hunting or weapons handling.

## II. Storage:

**6. Firearms should be unloaded when being stored or not in use.** Remove the magazine and any remaining rounds that may be in the chamber immediately after use. Store the weapon and ammunition in separate locked locations. In addition a trigger lock should be placed on the weapon after use.

**7. Store your weapons and ammunition in a safe location to prevent children from gaining access to your weapons.** Place a trigger lock on your weapon and then place the weapon in a locked location and carry the key with you at all times. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that more than 1.7 million children live in homes with loaded, unlocked guns. More than 500 children die annually from accidental gunshots. Some shoot themselves, most kill friends or siblings, often after discovering a gun and becoming curious. Storing your weapon properly only half the battle, teaching children to be safe around firearms is the other half. Even if no one in your family owns a firearm, chances are that someone you know does. Your child could come in contact with a firearm at a neighbor’s house, when playing with friends, or under other circumstances outside you home. Above all, tell your children that if he or she should come across a firearm, leave it alone and tell an adult.

## III Useage:

**8. Don’t alter or modify your gun, have it serviced by a professional and clean it regularly.** Firearms are arguably as dangerous as electricity. If you are not a certified electrician, you would not modify your homes circuit breaker. Be sure your weapon is serviced and modified by a certified armorer. Before cleaning your weapon, make absolutely sure that it is unloaded and no ammunition is in the chamber. Regular cleaning is important in order for your firearm to operate correctly and safely. Taking proper care of it will extend its life. Your firearm should be cleaned every time that it is used in accordance with the manufacturer guidelines.

**9. Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before shooting.** Inspect your weapon prior to use. If you are hunting there is a greater likely-hood of getting debris inside your muzzle. In addition, be sure the ammunition you are using is the proper ammunition for your weapon. This will help prevent the improper projectile from getting lodged in the barrel of your weapon.

**10. Be sure of your target and what is behind it.** When shooting, whether it be for target practice or hunting ensure that no part of your target will cause a ricochet. It would not be very funny to be that guy that is who “shot his eye out” or who “shot their hunting partner”. Speaking of shooting your eye out it is also a good practice to always wear eye and ear protection when on any shooting range.

**11. Learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the firearm you are using.**

If your gun fails to fire when the trigger is pulled, handle with care. Every weapon has a different remedial action. When remediating refer to # 3, again it would not be fun to shoot your own, foot, leg or hand.